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ABSTRACT

A preliminary, descriptive overview of the students and their progress in the first year of a new French immersion program looks at the 1982-83 grade 8 cohort of 40 students, most of whom had come from the standard core French program in grades 6 and 7, and compares their progress in other subjects with two grade 8 classes in another school. Data used include the students' grade 7 reading comprehension and mathematics problem solving Canadian Test of Basic Skills scores, grade 7 Dominion Test of Learning Capacity IQ score, and the number of hours of prior French instruction. In addition, the immersion students were given French reading and listening tests and all were given a mathematics skills test. Results indicate that the immersion students were, overall, well above average in intelligence and prior academic achievement, but showed considerable variability within the group. As a group, they were progressing well in French language skills and learning in other subject areas. A review of the program's entrance requirements is recommended to assess their appropriateness for the less able students in the demanding program. (MSE)

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ELEMENTARY LATE FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM: PRELIMINARY STUDY

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Research Report 83-07

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ELEMENTARY LATE FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM: PRELIMINARY REPORT

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Educational Research Services

During the school year 1982-83, the London system began its first elementary late French immersion program at Lord Roberts school. The 40 grade 8 students came from 21 different elementary schools with no more than 5 (13%) from any one school. The majority of these students (91%) had taken the standard French program in grades 6 and 7, i.e., 40 minutes of instruction per day in each grade for a total of 240 hours of instruction. The remainder of the students had a non-standard program, usually through attending another school system and/or receiving more than 240 hours of French instruction.

Since the program was in its first year of operation with all of the expected start-up problems, this study was designed simply to obtain a preliminary descriptive overview of the students and their progress.

METHOD

Students

All 40 students enrolled in the grade 8 French immersion program at Lord Roberts school during the 1982-83 school year were included in the study. In addition, in order to assess the degree to which immersion students were managing in subjects other than French, two grade 8 classes from Stoneybrook Public School (69 students) were also included.

Data Collection

For all of the Lord Roberts students, the following data items were collected: prior elementary school, grade 7 Reading Comprehension and Mathematics Problem Solving CTBS standard scores, Grade 7 Dominion Test of

Learning Capacity (DTLC) IQ score and the number of hours of prior French instruction.

Students at Lord Roberts were given the IEA Population II French Reading and Listening tests. Students at both Lord Roberts and Stoneybrook were also given the locally-developed Pre-Secondary School Mathematics Skills Test. All tests were administered by a specially-trained teacher during the last week in May or first week in June, 1933.[1]

Data Analysis

All tests were machine-scored and all of the data analyses were conducted by computer using standard programs(SPSS). The data analyses consisted simply of calculating descriptive statistics and preparing percentage frequency distributions.

RESULTS

Table 1 provides a summary of the descriptive statistics calculated for the variables available for study. Test data were not available for about 17% of the immersion students.

It is obvious from these data that the immersion students, as a group, are well above average in both intelligence and prior academic achievement. There is, however, considerable variability in the group, with about one tenth of the students having average or below average ability and one quarter with less than average prior achievement.

Immersion students' performance on the IEA Population II French Reading and Listening tests is quite good, with mean score of 25 and 26 respectively. These tests were designed for 14 year olds with two or three years of secondary level instruction. Mean raw scores

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[1]The authors would like to thank Mrs. Gerry Tordiff for her help with this aspect of the study.

from other countries vary in reading from 14.2 (U.S.A.) to 18.3 (Scotland) and in listening from 13.3 (New Zealand) to 17.0 (England). (Carroll, J.B, 1975). It should be remembered, however, that the students tested from other countries during the IEA study were, unlike the London students, essentially a random sample of all 14 year old students taking French.

The grade 8 immersion students, as a group, are quite similar to the last group of London students to have taken the original elementary French program (20 min./day in grades 7 and 8) and continued to study French to the end of grade 11 (Stennett and Earl, 1982). About two-thirds of each group are girls. Their average grade 7 CTBS mathematics standard scores are 66 and 67 and their mean DTLC IQ scores are 117 and 116. Both groups were given the IEA Population II Reading and Listening tests. The mean scores for the grade 8 immersion and grade 11 groups were, respectively, 25 and 24 for reading and 26 and 21 for listening. It is apparent, therefore, that in these two skill areas the grade 8 immersion students are performing about as well as students who had the original elementary program, plus three years of high school instruction in French.

Immersion students' performance on the Pre-Secondary School Mathematics Skills test is quite similar to that of students in the contrast group, with both groups answering about 75% of the items correctly. These two groups of students are roughly comparable in terms of intellectual ability. Therefore, to the extent that the results in mathematics are typical of those in other subjects, it appears that immersion students' general academic achievement has not been hampered by receiving instruction in French.

SUMMARY

A preliminary study of London's first elementary French immersion students indicates that, as a group, they are doing quite well in both developing French language skills and learning in other subject areas. As a group, the immersion students are above average in both intellectual ability and prior academic achievement. There is, however, considerable variability within the group and it is possible that some of the less capable and less well prepared students will find the immersion program too difficult. A review of the entrance requirements for the program may be helpful.

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics for the Variables Avaiable in the Study

Variable	N	Maximum Score Possible	Mean	S.D.	Score Range
CTBS Reading Comp. S.S. (Gr.7)	33	-	64	9.4	45-77
CTBS Math. S.S. (Gr.7)	35	-	66	9.8	46-83
DTLC IQ (Gr.7)	35	-	117	12.5	92-149
System Math (Immersion Class)	32	66	49	8.1	28-63
System Math (Contrast Class)	69	66	51	5.6	39-64
Population II Listening	32	40	26	5.8	15-37
Population II Reading	33	35	25	6.6	15-35

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